Today was my first day in Ms. Caruso’s class of 15 students at Dutch Valley Elementary. This is a third grade class. When I arrived this morning, my teacher had two hours as a double planning period. The first hour was used by the teacher to plan for a meeting she would be having with her principle during the following hour. I was assigned to take down a bulletin board. I understand that with teacher’s busy schedules it can be hard to get such tasks completed.

The teacher spoke with me briefly about the class. She asked if I would like to figure out the students on my own or if I would like warnings. I thought warnings could come in handy, so I said go ahead and give me the warnings, but at the same time I was hesitant. I feel like each student/teacher relationship should come from scratch with any preconceived judgments. She warned me about two students being off task on many occasions, and that I needed to watch them carefully. I felt okay about her telling me that. I took it as if she was asking me to help her keep an eye on these students and to divert them back to their tasks. Then we went to the meeting with the principle. One of my peers, and her mentoring 3rd grade teacher was also at the meeting. The meeting was about meeting state guidelines for students who are below grade level. I felt like there was progress and important knowledge passed along during the meeting. One teacher began mocking a student with ADD. I felt this was inappropriate. Another school official, the academic advisor, joined in the mocking. As a parent and a person with a learning disability, I now feel very negatively towards the professionalism of these school staff members. The principal neither joined, nor advised against the behavior.

When the children returned to the classroom, they began reading time. I listened to two students read, assisted them with words, and discussed what they were reading with them. Once reading time was over, the students went to lunch. Recess followed. After recess, the children worked on math by completing a worksheet on 3-digit subtraction. The answers were discussed and it was time for the children to go to a math class in another room. The children in our room were there for intervention. The teacher worked with one student on reading, while I worked with six other students on 3-digit subtraction. The students had obviously missed the concept of place value. I tried to explain it, but had no manipliatives (virtual or hands on) to use. We were using small white boards to work on, and there was not enough room to perform subtraction on a written place value chart with written value blocks. When intervention was finished, it was time to go home.

I discussed my upcoming lesson plans with the teacher. When we discussed math, I asked if she would like me to teach place value. She said she had already taught it, and she couldn’t tell since the students didn’t get it. She said she is not concerned with 3-digit subtraction because students will be using calculators for the answers on their TCAP tests. She said she is dropping the topic and moving onto multiplication. I will be introducing multiplication to the students in my lesson plan.

I knew there were issues in schools, and with having two kids in the same grade with different teachers each year, we have typically had one successful teacher and one who is not…each year. I can honestly say it is one of the most stressful things I deal with as a parent. Looking at it from the other side of the fence, I see teachers who are teaching because it is their job, and with most jobs-people slack. I do not believe the education of our children is a “job” to slack in, and I do not believe it should be acceptable on any level. I am also aware that many teachers earned their degrees during a time when education was handled and delivered differently. That may be an excuse for some, but I believe a successful teacher can be found in a person who truly enjoys teaching others, applies themselves, and constantly strive for improvement. I received an education in cosmetology around seven years ago. One thing that was constantly drilled in our heads throughout our education was that as soon as we think we know enough, that’s when we will start really messing up. You can never know enough, there is always room to grow. The biggest mistake anyone could make is thinking they have no room for improvement.

I know teaching is hard, and I have often asked myself if this is really what I want to do with my life. I am reminded that I can make a difference. I can be at least one teacher, provide at least one year, of successful learning to benefit and inspire a child. After today, I ask myself again, “Is this really what I want to do?” I may not like who I have to work with, and the choices that they make, but not only can I inspire a child, I can inspire other educators to be more. So I see a great task, a great responsibility ahead of me.